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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 001531

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SA](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [LE](#) [YM](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: SAUDI MINISTER OF STATE MADANI ON YEMEN, IRAN, THE
HAJJ AND MORE

REF: A. 09 RIYADH 1524
[1](#)B. SECSTATE 115549

RIYADH 00001531 001.3 OF 002

Classified By: Ambassador James B. Smith for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

[1](#)1. (C) During a meeting with Ambassador Smith on November 16, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr. Nizar Madani said the Saudis were "concerned" about politicization of the Hajj but prepared to "react strongly" if necessary. He thanked the U.S. for its support for the SAG's continuing military action on its southern border (ref A), said the "infiltrators were hit hard," and insisted operations would stay defensive in nature. He was suspicious of Iranian support for the Houthis; apprehensive about Iranian nuclear backsliding; but hopeful Iran was "rational" enough to not interfere with this year's Hajj. While the meeting was very cordial, Dr. Madani seemed uncharacteristically rushed. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

NO POLITICIZATION OF THE HAJJ

[1](#)2. (C) Madani noted that the entire SAG, including the MFA, was "very busy" gearing up for the Hajj. While there was still concern regarding the possibility of an H1N1 outbreak, the SAG had taken all possible precautions to limit this possibility. Politicization of the Hajj was "always a concern," but the SAG was adamant that the Hajj was a religious event that should not be used for political gain. They hoped that no one would try to cause an incident, he continued, but were prepared to "react strongly" in the event someone did. "Our leaders mean what they say," he stressed, noting that politicization of the Hajj adversely affected all pilgrims.

STRONG U.S. SUPPORT, BUT AL-QAEDA THE REAL ISSUE

[1](#)3. (S/NF) Ambassador re-iterated strong U.S. support for Saudi Arabia's right to defend its borders and take defensive action within its territory. He noted that the U.S. was ready to respond quickly to Saudi requests, and additional

munitions requested by the SAG had arrived in country that morning. Ambassador then stressed that the U.S. still believed a negotiated ROYG-Houthi settlement was preferable to a continued campaign against the Houthis, which was a distraction from the more critical fight against Al-Qaeda.

INFILTRATORS HIT HARD

¶4. (C) Madani expressed his thanks, adding that support within the region and elsewhere for the SAG's defensive actions was nearly unanimous. Border security was key to any country's stability, he continued, and the Saudi-Yemeni border had been historically problematic. Although the Saudis, together with the GCC, had initially viewed the Houthi rebellion as an internal problem, the situation changed once the Houthis crossed the border. He maintained that the Saudi military would protect the border and "hit infiltration hard," but did not plan to bring the fight into Yemen.

¶5. (C) When asked if he thought President Saleh would be willing to consider a negotiated settlement with the Houthis he was non-committal. He observed that the Yemeni government was facing three serious internal challenges: from the Houthis in the North, the secessionists in the South, and "Al-Qaeda all over." At this point, it was unclear how Saleh evaluated his strength vis-a-vis the Houthis. If he felt he could defeat them he would continue, Madani suggested, otherwise he may be willing to consider negotiation. Madani was "not aware" of how the Yemenis were currently assessing the situation.

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WHY DID THE HOUTHIS CROSS THE ROAD...

¶6. (C) Madani said there were "many theories" as to why the Houthis crossed into Saudi Arabia, most notably that they had been pushed by Iran to cause trouble for Saudi Arabia. He "hoped this was not true," but added Iranian FM Mottaki's comments raised question marks. "Why are they saying this," he asked, "unless they have plans?" In his view, the fact they made the statement at all was proof of Iranian involvement.

AFGHAN INAUGURATION DELEGATION TBD

¶7. (C) Per ref B, Ambassador conveyed the U.S.'s intent to send a senior official to President Karzai's inauguration and urged Saudi Arabia to do the same. Madani said that he had recommended high-level Saudi attendance at the event, but was not yet sure who would attend. He seemed genuinely non-plussed when asked why no Saudi representative attended the most recent Friends of Democratic Pakistan meeting and suggested they may not have received the invitation in time. (COMMENT: Given that the last FODP meeting coincided with the Eid Holiday, the UNGA, and the G-20 summit, it is somewhat plausible that it slipped through the Saudi cracks. However, it underscores the importance of developing a clear, coherent mechanism of informing the Saudis well in advance of upcoming meetings so as to ensure appropriate representation. END COMMENT.) Regarding naming an SRAP, he requested additional clarification regarding what duties this position would entail.

IRAN NOT HELPFUL

¶8. (C) Madani said the Saudis still hoped that a diplomatic

settlement with Iran was possible, but were worried as it seemed Iran was "going back to square one." Ambassador observed that Iran's current behavior was indeed unhelpful. At some point we would have to address the issue of sanctions, and if and when we did, it would be important to have a single message. Madani would not speculate as to when the Saudis thought a discussion of sanctions would be necessary, but said they hoped Iran was "rational enough" not to try and exploit the Hajj season.

PLEASED WITH PROGRESS IN LEBANON

¶9. (C) Things were "moving in the right direction" in Lebanon, Madani said, and the Saudis were pleased with the prospects for Hariri's new government. While "surprises can happen," there was no indication of serious problems and Syria's behavior had been encouraging.

IRAQ: MALIKI'S COMMENTS "NOT ENCOURAGING"

¶10. (C) Madani said that the Saudis were hoping for success and stability in Iraq and that they would have "no problem" with election results as long as the process was free and fair. However, they remained concerned about Iranian influence. Further, anti-Saudi statements from PM Maliki and others were not encouraging. "We show good intentions," he noted, "and we expect these to be returned."

SMITH